

1. Call to Order

The Chester Planning & Zoning Commission met on Thursday, November 12, 2020 at the Town Hall, beginning with a Public Hearing. Chairman Jon Lavy called to meeting to order at 7:05 P.M.

2. Roll Call and Seating of Alternates:

Commission members in attendance and seated were Elaine Fitzgibbons, Henry Krempel, Jon Lavy, Steven Merola, Bettie Perreault and Peter Zanardi; attending via ZOOM were Michael Sanders, Seth Fidel, Alternates Pat Bisacky, Shubert Koong. Also present were John Schroeder and Tyler Gilbert. Alternate Bisacky was seated for Keith Sherber. Present via ZOOM were Walter Arroyo, Bria Gilbert, Jared Hardell, Paul Lewis, Brian Knudsen, Paul Radicchi, Heather Reibold, Jody Reilly, Priscilla Robinson and Ed Ward (WPCA Chair).

3. Chairman Lavy called the Public Hearing to order at 7:10 P.M. and read the published legal notice.

Application for Special Exception #SE 10-05-20 submitted by John Schroeder (applicant) and Bria & Tyler Gilbert (owner) for proposed Additions and Renovations, on property located at 43, 45, 47 Main Street, Chester, Connecticut, Tax Map 14, Lot 544, Village District.

John Schroeder, representing Bria and Tyler Gilbert, briefed the Commission on the history of the owners, noting they came to Chester to “engage with the fabric and rhythm of the town” and the plans for the property are designed to meet that goal, with compliance of applicable Codes. Approval has been received from the Inland Wetlands & Watercourses Agency, and has been addressed by the Water Pollution Control Authority, which has connections and manholes located to the rear of the building.

Giving a history of the property from the Chester Scrapbook and showing before and after photos and 3-D images, Schroeder went through the proposed design changes for the three sections of the structure, including, briefly, the following:

- Raising the dormer roof of the northwest wing of the building, addition of windows to replace individual dormers.
- Bumping out by three feet the front of the main structure to bring it closer to the street and “to better articulate the façade; installing larger first floor windows for better retail visibility; replacing stairs to the second floor (proposed for office use) for Code compliance.
- Filling in the porch area of the northeast wing of the structure to mirror the other end of the building; adding a second floor for office for owner (Bria Gilbert – financial planner.)

- Replacing windows of the rear of the window to better match those of the front, and replace decking with three, separate new decks separated by partitions for each of the three units.
- Note of the WPCA manhole locations and the location of deck support columns (deemed to be decorative) to allow access for upkeep, maintenance and repair.
- Colors designated on the presented 3-D renderings were shown as “slate blue-gray” for #43, “tan” for #45 and “olive green” for #47, with all trim being “charcoal gray”. Roofs of the three sections of the structure would be asphalt shingles of the same color throughout.

Participating members of the audience, all participating via ZOOM, brought up and discussed the following topics:

- Another coffee shop is suggested: this is a small town with limited parking and people are presently bypassing the area; there are already numerous coffee shops, concern about the economic impact.
 - Bria Gilbert apologized for concerns voiced, said owners are “mindful of the attitude” of the town
 - Chair Lavy noted retail use is a permitted use in this zone and conversation about the proposed uses should be held in another realm.
 - Where abutting property owners notified? Yes, via certified mail/return receipt, although the abutter from 51 Main Street had not returned the receipt.
 - Property owner of 44 Main Street expressed concerns about the large windows which would be facing the bathroom and kitchen in that residence, saying it would be “invasive” to privacy; that the property had not been used commercially in the past; and the impact on the last single-family residence in the center of the village would be significantly affected by the structural changes and potential proposed uses.
 - Schroeder said they had tried to be sensitive to others but the proposed windows were intended to bring the use of the retail space “to the Center”.
 - Lavy noted that mixed uses for the area were the intention of the Commission.
- “It’s a village but there aren’t any homes any more” and “this is going to impact my life more than anyone else.”
- Representing another property owner, request that all be mindful of how (economically) stressed everyone, residents/tenants/shop owners who are already there are; that bringing people into the center is one thing, while creating competition is not necessarily helpful.

Commission members were polled individually to ensure that questions had been addressed and if any other items needed answers. Those responding noted the following points:

- Would activities associated with a retail operation continue through to the deck area at the rear of the house?
- Request the applicant to remove any reference to a coffee shop or specific retail use from the application.
- During construction, how would those activities affect vehicular traffic in the center; how long would traffic disruption last? (Use of the parking lots on Maple Street and at the entrance to Laurel Hill were noted.)
- Separation of the three individual uses within the structure should include soundproofing and acoustical insulation.

Members of the public, speaking via ZOOM added the following:

- Ed Ward, W.P.C.A. Chair said the structure “looks better” as shown in the proposed improvements and the owners are being considerate.
- “It’s a beautiful building that needs TLC.”
- Conditions, including planned uses of the proposed retail space, can require the owners come back for specific approvals.
- Concern about the proposed retail space and for existing local businesses that are already in a competitive economy.
- Concern about the structural integrity of the structure itself.

There being no further input from Commission members or other participants,

On motion by Peter Zanardi, seconded by Henry Krempel, the Public Hearing portion of this meeting was adjourned at 8:21 P.M. with all seated members voting to approve.

Respectfully submitted,

Bettie Perreault

Secretary